

POTPOURRI NEWS

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The popular British tabloid *Reveille* last week astounded its readers with a front page story headlined "Sensation in Space". According to the story, reprinted from the American weekly *National Enquirer*, Soviet space experts have been tracking wreckage from an alien spaceship which broke up in orbit around the Earth nearly two years before the Russians launched the first Sputnik.

The report quotes science fiction writer Alexander Kazantsev, described as a professor, as saying "We believe it (the spacecraft) was at least 200 feet long and 100 feet

wide, and had small domes housing telescopes, saucer antennae for communication, and portholes."

Alexei Zolotov, a geologist, adds, "We estimate the alien's maximum height at nine feet. They could be as small as three feet". Kazantsev and Zolotov are well known as proponents of the idea that the enormous explosion over Siberia in 1908 was caused by a crash landing of a nuclear-powered alien spacecraft. (In fact, that explosion was almost certainly caused by the impact of a fragment from Encke's comet).

The report quotes Sergei Boshich, described as a "top Soviet astrophysicist", and Vladimir Azhazha, said to be a "top Moscow physicist", as agreeing that the wrecked spacecraft exploded into 10 pieces up to 100 feet long, on 18 December 1955. They say the pieces are orbiting the Earth at a height of 1240 miles.

But Western experts have no knowledge of such unidentified fragments. "If there were objects of the size and distance suggested by the Russians they would be tracked both by radar and visually," says Desmond

King-Hele, of the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough. "We have seen no such objects".

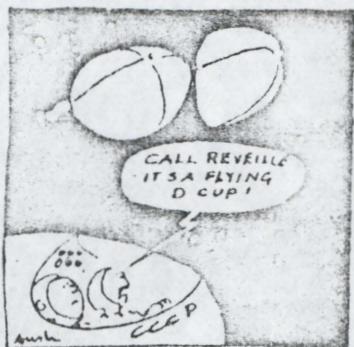
US Airforce radars in operation since the start of the space age can track orbiting objects as small as one yard across. What is more, a 100 foot object orbiting at a height of 1000 miles would appear as bright as the Echo balloon satellites of the 1960s, which was seen by many people as they drifted across the sky like brilliant stars. "There are no alien spacecraft knocking around in orbit" says Desmond King-Hele.

So what's behind the Russian report? The whole theory seems to be based on a 10 year old misunderstanding. In 1969 an American scientist, John Bagby, published a paper (*Icarus*, vol 10, p 1) which claimed that the Earth possesses at least 10 moonlets, formed when a parent body broke up on 18 December 1955 —the same date now given by the Russians for the "spacecraft explosion". Crucial to Bagby's case were sudden changes in the published orbits of certain Earth satellites,

which he put down to near encounters between artificial satellites and his moonlets.

But Bagby's evidence was erroneous, as pointed out by Belgian astronomer Jean Meeus (*Icarus*, vol 19, p 547). In a withering criticism of what he termed "Bagby's phantom moonlets," Meeus noted that the satellite data used by Bagby were at best approximate and at worst grossly in error so that the apparent orbital changes were illusory. "Bagby's story on the Earth moonlets thus appears groundless," Meeus wrote. "The objects cited by Bagby do not exist".

The Russians, it seems, have now turned phantom moonlets into a phantom spacecraft. □



★★ The Houston Post/Sun., Aug. 26, 1979/ 7A

Experts from 14 nations to study UFO 'evidence'

LONDON (AP) — Experts from 14 countries gather here this weekend to study what they call mounting evidence of "close humanoid encounters," alleged CIA cover-ups of the critters and other Unidentified Flying Objects.

The organizers, the British UFO Research Association, said they expect around 300 delegates to turn up at the two-day conference beginning Sunday.

Among the scheduled speakers is Dr. J. Allen Hynek, one of America's leading Ufologists, as UFO investigators are called.

Other delegates who have signed up to attend come from Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa,

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Spain, Sweden, West Germany and Yugoslavia.

The organizers said in a statement the congress would "discuss ways of improving the study of UFOs and re-examine the mounting worldwide evidence for close humanoid encounters."

The statement added: "A controversial issue certain to be aired . . . is the growing unease in the United States over Central Intelligence Agency involvement in UFO reporting." Ufologists repeatedly have accused authorities of concealing knowledge of UFOs from the public despite what they say is mounting evidence that they exist. Other sessions "will cover humanoid cases in Spain" and "the unprecedented wave of UFOs reported in Italy and Sicily."